

# **A Survey Of Members Of The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force**

*Task Force Member Opinions Regarding the Past and Future  
of the SFERTF*

This report has been prepared in preparation  
for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary meeting of the  
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force,  
December 2 and 3, 2003  
Del Ray Beach, Florida

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This report summarizes a survey undertaken among members of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force in preparation for its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary meeting on December 2 and 3, 2003. The purpose of the survey is to provide background information about the views of Task Force members concerning its past and future. The results of the survey will be used to help stimulate and frame discussion about Task Force challenges and priorities going forward.

The survey included nine questions addressing such considerations as the accomplishments and shortcomings of the Task Force, lessons learned to date, issues to address in the future, proposed changes, and suggestions as to how to best assist the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). The interviews were conducted by phone by Stuart Langton, a consultant to the Task Force in late October and early November 2003. In a few instances alternate members were interviewed because of their long and intimate knowledge of the Task Force and/or because of the unavailability of a member. A list of those interviewed is included in Appendix B.

The questions asked in the survey and the responses are included in Appendix A. The responses quote or paraphrase as closely as possible views expressed by Task Force members without attribution.

### **Summary Of Major Points**

The overall tone among members in regard to the Task Force was positive with particular appreciation for the current leadership. The views expressed by members were insightful and diverse. To appreciate the full range of ideas and opinions, Appendix A should be reviewed. The views expressed most frequently in regard to the nine questions are as follows:

1. The major accomplishments of the Task Force include providing a common forum to share information, promoting consensus, helping to secure key legislation such as the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), CERP, and Farm Bill provisions, and providing a holistic and integrative restoration perspective.
2. The major reasons for the Task Force accomplishments are the ability of Task Force leaders and the composition of the membership.
3. The major shortcomings of the Task Force are the limitation inherent in being an advisory/coordinating group, parochialism by agencies on occasions, and reluctance to address some issues of conflict.
4. Factors that have contributed to the shortcomings of the Task Force include irregular meetings, poor attendance, and non-significant agenda items.
5. The major lessons to be learned from the first 10 years of experience are: to address critical issues in a timely manner, to provide adequate direction to the

Working Group and its sub-groups, and to establish clear Task Force priorities and meaningful agendas for all meetings.

6. The most important issues the Task Force should address in the next ten years are: water quality, population growth, assuring real progress, maintaining a holistic ecosystem perspective, and provision of qualitative scientific input.
7. The priority issues of the Task Force for the next several years should be the progress of CERP, modified water deliveries, and water quality.
8. In providing consultation to CERP, the role of the Task Force should be clearly defined and it should be highly collaborative and not heavy-handed.
9. The changes that should be made in the Task Force are to strengthen the Working Group and Science Coordinating Team and their relations with the Task Force, to be disciplined in maintaining a meeting schedule and focus on only the most meaningful issues, and to address conflict issues in a timely and thorough manner.

### **Additional Matters To Consider**

Those interviewed in this survey have identified a wide range of issues of importance to the restoration effort and to the Task Force. A number of those issues are summarized above. However, there are a number of additional issues that have been identified by one or a couple of Task Force members that might be worthy of greater consideration by the Task Force in the near future. The issues include the following:

- existing invasive species
- new invasive species
- estuaries, coral reefs, and offshore resources
- ecosystem problems in communities around Lake Okeechobee
- inclusion of agricultural, environmental, and developer perspectives
- monitoring of ASR
- strengthening connections with local government and regional planning agencies
- rising sea levels
- progress in land acquisition
- water quality from Lake Okeechobee

## Deeper Challenges

The survey does suggest that there are some matters about which there are some difference in perspective and opinion among some Task Force members that may be important to the future of the Task Force. These differences include the following issues and questions:

- A. **Limits Of Task Force Role:** As a coordinating body, how assertive should the Task Force be in regard to issues about which many or most members have a concern? How far should the Task Force go and how should it take action in expressing concern, displeasure, disagreement, or support of a policy, practice, or act of any agency, group, or institution? What is the protocol for vetting such issues and determining action?
- B. **Role In Resolving Conflicts:** Can and should the Task Force play a relevant role in resolving conflicts? If so, what are the conflicts it should or should not address? How far should the Task Force go in its efforts to resolve conflicts, and what kinds of activities are appropriate and inappropriate in this regard?
- C. **State And Federal Commitment To Restoration:** Is there equitable commitment from state and federal government to the restoration? In what ways have either levels of government failed to live up to or fallen behind their commitments? What, if anything, can the Task Force do to address such matters?
- D. **Assuring Good Science:** What is it that the Task Force wants and expects from scientists in support of the restoration and its coordinating role? What can be done to promote and protect the independence, objectivity, balance, and relevance of scientific input to the Task Force? What things can be done to maximize the contributions of scientists to the considerations of the Task Force?

## **Appendix A: Survey Questions And Responses**

### **1) What have been the most important accomplishments of the Task Force?**

- a) leadership in securing passage of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1996 and 2000;
- b) providing important information and advice to help develop the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP);
- c) surviving for 10 years;
- d) providing an open Forum to address important restoration issues;
- e) providing an orderly and rational way to get major participants on the same wave-length;
- f) ability to adapt to changes in political administrations at federal and state levels;
- g) major role in building consensus among agencies regarding CERP;
- h) development of an action plan for Lake Okeechobee;
- i) obtaining \$300 million from the Farm Bill for restoration;
- j) a successful dialogue in coordinating dialogue and getting issues on the table;
- k) obtaining passage of WRDA, and gaining relief from the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA);
- l) forcing focus on the entire ecosystem of South Florida;
- m) good mechanism for agencies to come to understand each other's concerns;
- n) encouraging interagency sharing;
- o) assistance in passage of WRDA 2000 that established the CERP;
- p) ability to look at the big picture including issues such as population growth, invasive species, estuaries, coral reefs, etc.;
- q) promoting a strong science approach to restoration;
- r) engaging multiple parties in planning and conflict resolution;
- s) ability to get diverse interests on same page at the same time;
- t) creation of a two year planning document that provides the big picture, informs Congress and agencies, and helps in tracking issues and progress;
- u) reviewing and helping with the development of programmatic regulations for the CERP;
- v) reviewing and updating the charters of the Working Group and Science Coordinating Team;
- w) creating understanding of issues;
- x) seeing issues from the perspective of the whole ecosystem;
- y) getting together the priority list for Farm Bill acquisitions;
- z) putting together the critical mass for key legislation in Florida and Washington;
- aa) efforts that led to the restoration plan;
- bb) development of WRDA 2000;
- cc) the cross-cut budget and programmatic regulations

**2) What are the reasons for the accomplishments of the Task Force?**

- a) the right composition of stakeholders;
- b) providing regular forums on issues;
- c) because the Task Force established common goals;
- d) recognition that the Task Force is not the solution for all the hard problems, but it can resolve some and allow others to be worked out in the political and judicial arenas;
- e) because the Task Force provides a good forum;
- f) having good leadership;
- g) development of a cross-cut budget;
- h) encouraging collaboration such as that of Audubon and the sugar industry in lobbying together for WRDA;
- i) obtaining early critical projects grant monies;
- j) recently, strong leadership by Ann Klee, and continued good staff work by Rock Salt;
- k) because it has fostered coordination and common positions on many issues;
- l) ability to organize good sub-groups;
- m) establishing sources for scientific input;
- n) the chair, Ann Klee is excellent – smart, strong, respectful, a good people person;
- o) the work of Rock Salt and the addition of Greg May;
- p) some very good and talented Task Force members;
- q) the Executive Director, Rock Salt, and his office;
- r) having high level of senior representatives as members;
- s) excellent and intelligent people;
- t) all the right people, or alternates who can represent them, at the table;
- u) approaches are balanced and fair but do not obviate authority of agencies;
- v) having a good charter;
- w) developing consensus around controversial language;
- x) the use of issue teams to dig into difficult specific challenges;
- y) the commitment and ability of Rock Salt, the Executive Director
- z) the support from the Department of Interior;
- aa) the ability of agencies to collaborate on many issues over a long period

### **3) What have been the major shortcomings of the Task Force?**

- a) sometimes exceeding its role as an information-sharing and coordination body;
- b) sometimes devoting meeting time to issues of questionable significance;
- c) not given enough direction to the Working Group ( Ann is starting to work at this);
- d) bureaucratic hesitancy and covering up inadequacies in some agencies;
- e) unease in dealing with tough issues;
- f) need to pursue critical issues to conclusion;
- g) some agencies have too narrow an approach and do not look at the overall needs of restoration;
- h) have not paid enough attention to ecosystem challenges in poorer agricultural communities in South Florida;
- i) have not paid enough attention to issues of the coral reefs and off-shore resources;
- j) it took the new state and federal administrations a long time to get up to speed to be good participants;
- k) sometimes being led by the Department of the Interior is problematic, especially in trying to deal with the interests and behavior of the Everglades National Park;
- l) local governments still a bit stymied as to how to relate;
- m) ocean and coastal issues still not given enough attention;
- n) some members frustrated by the limited authority of the Task Force as an advisory group;
- o) the Task Force cannot address many difficult issues because it is an advisory body;
- p) the Task Force is not able to address shortcoming and failures within particular agencies;
- q) there are continued tensions regarding the independence and quality of scientific input;
- r) not enough attention has been given to issues of water quality, quantity, and timing;
- s) sometimes senior representatives fail to attend – it seems like this is happening more recently among state agency representatives;
- t) the amount of time it takes to look into scientific issues;
- u) need to stay in closer touch with local people;
- v) the fact that anyone can sue;
- w) sometimes not staying focused on the big picture;
- x) aside from the Corps and Water Management District, most agencies have other competing regional priorities;
- y) the political complexities surrounding many issues;
- z) the issues are not equally relevant to all the agencies so there are various levels of commitment to the process.

**4) What are the reasons for the shortcomings of the Task Force?**

- a) there have been several times when Task Force meetings were not held regularly;
- b) conflict issues have been avoided at various times;
- c) too much territoriality and pet pigs among some agencies;
- d) have not been effective enough in linking with regional planning agencies;
- e) have not found a way to link local officials together;
- f) there are built-in limits to any advisory group;
- g) the limited authority of the Task Force reduces its potential for impact;
- h) poor attendance among senior representatives – often caused by not having meaningful agendas.



**5) What are the most important lessons to be learned from the experience of the Task Force?**

- a) assure that the agenda is clear and well focused;
- b) regularly address issue of the role of the working group and relationship to the Task Force;
- c) assure that Forums represent all spectrums of opinion;
- d) understand and accept the inherent limits of the Task Force in resolving disputes – focus on information and communication and a lot of issues will be resolved;
- e) need good processes to provide comfort level in dealing with difficult issues;
- f) do not get captured by any one interest group or agency;
- g) make sure all Task Force sub-groups have clear missions and schedule, and are monitored carefully;
- h) be careful that science groups do not get out of control;
- i) maintain control of processes that are created;
- j) continue to examine and improve the Task Force;
- k) assure a bi-partisan approach;
- l) encourage adequate degree of continuity among Task Force members;
- m) encourage healthy debate and encourage flexibility among members;
- n) focus on connections between ecosystem restoration and economic development for the region;
- o) use the Task Force as a source of education of agencies and the public;
- p) appreciate that ecosystem restoration is of world-wide concern, and South Florida and the Task Force are setting the trend
- q) conduct regularly scheduled meetings;
- r) prepare clear and meaningful meeting agendas;
- s) send materials sufficiently in advance so members can review before meetings;
- t) establish clear goals for the Task Force to accomplish each year;
- u) provide regular biennial reports to document progress and issues;
- v) promote ongoing education among agencies and with the public;
- w) need to have a group, like the Task Force, to address over-arching and complex issues;
- x) keep dialogue occurring no matter what conflicts occur;
- y) if you do not address conflicts as they arise, they will grow;
- z) be prepared that some agencies will be excessively influenced by interest groups and their participation may be compromised;
- aa) all Task Force sub-groups need strong focus, good management, priorities, and performance measures;
- bb) when contentious issues arise, get people to work on them quickly;
- cc) get the right people on the Task Force and Working Group;
- dd) address critical issues without fear;
- ee) prioritize the Task Force agenda;
- ff) creating the charter was a key mechanism for success;
- gg) broadening the Task Force in 1996;
- hh) having a good blend of the right players;
- ii) understand how passionate some people will be about issues;

- jj) best work done when dealing with specific, concrete, task-oriented items;
- kk) keep the important issues in front of all the agencies and parties;
- ll) the alternatives should keep their principals up to date;
- mm) have a chair who can keep people from working their agenda – the present chair is good at this;
- nn) remain adaptable

**6) What are the most important issues that the Task Force should address in the next ten years?**

- a) monitor CERP and be sure that activities are being carried out in an integrated manner;
- b) anticipate that with implementation that more issues will arise;
- c) make sure real progress is occurring rather than staff expansion and report writing;
- d) make sure the ecosystem and things within it are being preserved;
- e) increasing sheet flow;
- f) strengthening communication and consensus among development and environmental interests;
- g) look at things from a holistic perspective;
- h) push agencies to look at the whole ecosystem and not just isolated projects;
- i) address funding issues, especially that Florida is outspending the Federal government 90% to 10% and more federal money is needed;
- j) address issue that Federal agencies are spending more on increased staff than on construction and land acquisition;
- k) population growth;
- l) rise in sea level;
- m) the relation between transportation planning and development;
- n) overseeing and building consensus on the CSOP schedule;
- o) continue to support modified water deliveries;
- p) engage in dialogue on water quality;
- q) address issue of water quality performance by Florida;
- r) encourage agencies to look beyond their goals to address system needs;
- s) the role, quality, and independence of science;
- t) tensions between scientists and managers;
- u) the relationship between the Task Force and CERP;
- v) population growth;
- w) population growth;
- x) invasive species;
- y) modified waters delivery;
- z) assure implementation is taking place as quickly as possible;
- aa) CERP;
- bb) modified waters delivery;
- cc) Kissimmee restoration;
- dd) implementation of CERP;
- ee) Critical Projects;
- ff) maintaining bi-partisan and non-partisan support;
- gg) water quality;**
- hh) water quality – this is the most important substantive issue;
- ii) how to deal with agriculture since there are many farmers who do not feel a part of the restoration process;
- jj) assuring credible and reliable science

**7) What should be the priority issues of the Task Force in the next several years?**

- a) focus on CERP;
- b) give more attention to coral reefs and estuaries;
- c) address issue of staff who are obstructionists within some agencies;
- d) address issue of Florida changing deadline regarding water quality standards, a clear agreement on a deadline is a must;
- e) resolving issues related to single species in a multi species restoration effort;
- f) the amount, focus, and results of federal funding;
- g) careful and thorough assessment of scale of ASR technology;
- h) water quality standards, especially changes from the Florida legislature;
- i) modified water deliveries;
- j) the issue of a single species vs. the entire ecosystem;
- k) expedited scheduling;
- l) water quality;
- m) modified water deliveries;
- n) reestablishing sheet flow;
- o) ecosystem perspective regarding endangered species;
- p) clearly define consultative role of Task Force regarding CERP;
- q) water quality;
- r) modified water deliveries;
- s) the CSOP;
- t) land acquisition;
- u) water quality;
- v) modified water deliveries;
- w) CERP and modified waters;
- x) water quality;
- y) programmatic regulations;
- z) quicken the pace of resolving conflicts

**8) What ideas and advice do you have as to how the Task Force should play a consultative role in relation to the CERP?**

- a) assure that all stakeholders are involved in dialogue about CERP;
- b) promote continuous sharing of information;
- c) avoid heavy-handed oversight;
- d) help to develop and review the interim goals of the programmatic regulations;
- e) monitor RECOVER plans and activities;
- f) establish roles and an agenda in concert with all players;
- g) avoid intruding on the authority of the COE or the SFWMD;
- h) encourage the Governor and the COE to bring agenda items regarding CERP to the Task Force;
- i) encourage full communication and clarification regarding all CERP issues;
- j) construct the Task Force role after careful study of legislation establishing consultative role;
- k) be very clear as to what to review, why, and to what end;
- l) be sensitive to the legal role of all parties;
- m) work in a collaborative manner in oversight;
- n) clarify the role and relationship between the Task Force and CERP;
- o) clarify the role of the Task Force and its member agencies in regard to how CERP is implemented:
- p) prioritize which CERP issues to deal with;
- q) provide a blended review;
- r) deal with big picture and do not get bogged down in the weeds;
- s) make sure other projects like Lake Okeechobee, Kissimmee River, C-111 and special projects are integrated with CERP;
- t) facilitate alternative dispute resolution when disagreements arise

- 9) **What changes, if any, should be made in the Task Force to strengthen its effectiveness?**
- a) improve the Working Group charter;
  - b) regularize meetings, set dates well in advance and do not cancel;
  - c) make sure all Task Force members understand its proper role;
  - d) provide greater supervision of the Science Coordination Team and other science groups;
  - e) make sure the Task Force knows and approves of what all sub-groups do;
  - f) be more disciplined in establishing meeting dates and sticking to them;
  - g) deal with issues without fear of being sued, especially regarding the Endangered Species Act;
  - h) strengthen the relation between the Task Force and Working Group – continue work on rewriting charter;
  - i) look at lessening involvement of state agency leaders and address reasons for this;
  - j) things are going well now, especially with Ann Klee's leadership;
  - k) the Task Force should bring more critical issues to a vote;
  - l) be willing to address the most difficult issues;
  - m) do not assume all is going well;
  - n) clarify who should be on and lead the Science Coordination Team, why, and how long?
  - o) streamline the Working Group;
  - p) formalize the restructuring of the SCT;
  - q) focus on real issues at meetings and reduce reports;
  - r) take overall leadership in guiding, assessing and implementing the overall restoration effort;
  - s) take overall leadership for communicating the importance and progress of the restoration to the public;
  - t) provide more direction to the Working Group and clarify expectations;
  - u) strengthen response to new threats to the environment such as the introduction of the reed *Arundo Donax* into the EAA;
  - v) no changes, but we do need to work on the inclusion of and relations between agricultural and environmental interests;
  - w) maintain as it is;
  - x) make sure the Working Group has clear mandates;
  - y) meeting agendas must be relevant;
  - z) more convenient meeting places for state agency representatives;
  - aa) may not need four meetings per year;
  - bb) focus on specific issues and tasks – Ann, as chair, is good at this;
  - cc) stick to a regular meeting schedule;
  - dd) more meetings in Tallahassee to increase state participation

## **Appendix B: Persons Interviewed**

Michael Collins, Water Resources Advisory Committee,  
South Florida Water Management District;

Henry Dean, South Florida Water Management District;

Jose Diaz, Miami-Dade County Commission;

Andrew Emrich, U.S. Department of Justice;

Mack Gray, U. S. Department of Agriculture

Benjamin Grumbles, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency;

Timothy Keeney, U. S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric  
Administration;

Ann Klee, U. S. Department of Interior;

Linda Lawson, U. S. Department of Transportation

Dexter Lehtinen, Miccosukee Tribe of Indians;

James Murley, Florida Atlantic University;

James Shore, Seminole Tribe of Florida;

Rick Smith, Office of the Governor, State of Florida;

David Struhs, Department of Environmental Protection, State of Florida;

Earl Stockdale, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers